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SPORTSMEN SNAKE GEESSE BECAUSE TWO WHOOPERS WERE THERE

Nebraska sportsmen dipped their guns in a grand salute to the whooping crane last week--and merely watched while hundreds of white-fronted geese grazed peacefully along the shores of the Harlan County Reservoir, according to reports to the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service.

It was the presence of two of the few remaining whooping cranes, stopping in the goose flock to rest on their southward migration, which caused the hunters to stay their fire. With only two whooping cranes in a flock of several hundred geese, the chances of killing a crane by trying to bag a goose were very small--but the hunters declined to take even that small chance at hitting them.

At the same time an advance guard of five weary whoopers arrived at Aransas Refuge in Texas--so tired, observers say, that for a long while they huddled in the marsh, wings drooping and heads down, apparently exhausted from the long flight which started days and days ago from the Canadian northland near Great Slave Lake. One of the five was a young-of-the-year. A sixth whooper, the one which did not migrate north last spring, is still at Aransas, and eight more adults since have completed their migration, bringing the total number to 14 on October 27.

One other brightening bit of news came out of Nebraska in the past few days. This is that the bird which had been killed by striking a power line was not a whooping crane as first reported, but a white pelican. This leaves the known casualties of the flock this year to one wounded or injured bird which has been seen at several places along the migration route lagging behind some other whoopers but gamely making progress toward its winter resting grounds at Aransas Refuge.

There were 28 whooping cranes at Aransas last winter. Only 25 of these went north in the spring. One crane disappeared during the winter and is presumed to be the victim of a predator. A second was injured and captured, and now is doing well in the zoo at San Antonio, Texas. The third is the one which remained at Aransas.

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